

Training Task Force

Benchmarks Committee

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The Benchmarks Committee was asked to identify best training practices, based upon a review of readily available materials and to assess the extent to which current practices across the agencies of Miami Dade County measure up to these benchmarks. Several publications were reviewed, phone interviews were held with representatives of other jurisdictions and with officials at the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD), and a survey was developed and distributed to all departments of Miami Dade County to establish a baseline of training activity as it exists today. A total of 29 departments responded to the survey, representing more than 22,000 employees. The results, therefore, include most departments and most employees.

The survey was designed to create a snapshot of existing departmental training approaches and resources for comparison with some benchmarks derived from reviewing national information and trends. While this should in no way be construed as a thorough and detailed training needs assessment or evaluation, it does paint a picture from which some common sense recommendations can be derived. Because of the need to gather information relatively quickly, no extensive discussions were held with the persons responding to the survey on behalf of the various departments. An explanation of terms was included in an effort to assure that respondents had a common understanding of the questions and issues, and a help line was provided for people who had questions. Still, it is likely that some of the responses are limited by the understanding of the respondents.

The following paragraphs and the related charts and tables briefly describe major benchmarks covered by the survey, comparing where possible the performance of County departments with results from a survey conducted by the National Benchmarking Forum, a group of companies (with some government agencies represented) that works on training-related benchmarking issues under the auspices of ASTD. A set of recommendations flowing from the survey results is included.

GOALS:

More than 75% of the reporting departments indicated that training goals and policies are in place. While this does not address the quality and thoroughness of the goals and policies, any sound training program should have goals and policies in place. The benchmark value, therefore, would be for 100% of the departments to have goals and policies in place.

INNOVATIVE PRACTICES:

Various practices are recognized through the National Benchmarking Forum of ASTD as being important in the delivery of training services. Based upon the survey results, the extent of utilization of five specific practices by County departments falls well short of the utilization of those practices by members of the Benchmarking Forum (generally recognized to reflect the organizations working to achieve best practices). As noted on the attached bar graph, County utilization rates tend to be a third to a half of the rates achieved by the Forum.

COMPETENCE TRAINING:

Competence training relates to perfection of the actual job skills required by employees to perform their assigned tasks. County departments reported significantly lower utilization rates of the suite of competence training practices than those reported by the Benchmark Forum participants, with the exception of the "Mandatory Annual Training Time" category in which over 40% of County agencies reported using the approach as compared with 28% of the Benchmarking Forum group. The utilization rates are portrayed on the attached bar chart.

HIGH PERFORMANCE WORK PRACTICES

The use of "high performance work practices" implies training to enable employees to make effective use of the opportunities to improve agency performance through such things as self directed work teams. The survey results indicate relatively low utilization of these approaches by County agencies as compared with the Benchmarking Forum participants, as noted on the attached bar chart.

QUALITY PRACTICES

Quality practices relate to how well organizations strive for and achieve quality services. These include the use of quality circles, problem solving teams, benchmarking, and total quality management. Again, County respondents indicate a significantly lower rate of use of these practices than do the members of the Benchmarking Forum, as noted on the attached chart.

APPRENTICESHIP PRACTICES

County agencies utilize employee and student apprenticeship programs at significantly lower rates than do Benchmarking Forum members, as noted on the bar chart.

TRAINING PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Ideally training will change both trainee and organizational behavior. Measuring changes in organizational behavior can be quite difficult, and the bar chart clearly indicates that this is rarely done among County agencies. Most often training experiences are evaluated by trainees. The benchmark here is to have the full range of performance measures, from content and trainer evaluation by trainees to measuring the change in trainee and organizational behavior attributable to the training experience. Linking measurable outcomes to the design of training programs is a critical (and often difficult) aspect of training design. There may be an underlying assumption that more training is always better, but experience and common sense suggest that training in the absence of both measurable and measured outcomes may simply be an exercise in hoping that the program will have some beneficial result. In that sense, training performance measurement is just a subset of the larger issue of measuring all kinds of program outcomes and relating those outcomes back to program goals.

ACHIEVEMENT OF GOALS AND ADEQUACY OF RESOURCES

Over a third of the reporting departments indicated that their training programs achieve their training goals while more than 60% of respondents indicated that they do not have enough resources to meet their goals. These somewhat inconsistent conclusions may reflect the fact that goals are generally not quantified and tracked and related to resources in a systematic way.

The total training expenditure reported for training in 1997/98 is more than \$19.5 million. Almost \$16 million of this total is spent in four departments (Police, Fire, Transit, Corrections) reflecting about half of the 22,000 employees covered by the responding departments. About \$14 million of the total \$19.5 million is allocated to training staff salaries. Total reported training expenditures as a percentage of total salary and wage costs is about 2% overall. A frequently cited national benchmark value for this ratio is 3%. Only the Fire Department exceeds this benchmark with approximately 4% of salary and wage costs being expended on training. The ratio of training expenditures to number of employees varies widely, ranging from a high of more than \$4200 per employee per year (in a relatively new agency, Team Metro) to less than \$60 per employee per year (with two agencies reporting no training expenditures at all). The variability may be explained by the availability of resources, training mandates associated with certain jobs, and interpretations as to what constitutes training by the survey respondents. Overall about 3% of training funds are spent on the tuition reimbursement program and about 8% are spent on conferences and seminars. About 5% of the total are spent on contract training providers.

DELIVERY METHODS

The predominant training delivery system reported from the survey is instructor-led classroom training. This is consistent with the national experience. The use of video tapes and workbooks is common, but the more technically based approaches such as computer based training or “distance learning” delivered from a remote location through an electronic link is hardly utilized at all, notwithstanding the potential of efficiency represented by these new technologies.

OTHER OBSERVATIONS

The survey data indicate that various departments contract with more than 40 vendors for various types of training. Several different departments contract with the same vendors for similar types of services, although it appears that these contracts are not directly coordinated. The various agencies have a variety of training facilities and equipment, but nothing is revealed concerning the utilization of these resources. The County’s commitment at this time is very clearly to internally-staffed training programs, as reflected by the expenditure data. Nationally there is an on-going discussion concerning in-house training services versus contracting out for such services. There are no systematic training assessment, delivery, and evaluation programs in place to assure uniformity in these approaches across the County organization. Certification and training mandates in certain program areas account for the concentration of resources in those areas. There is great variability among departments in terms of their capacity for training and their resources devoted to training.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A Training Council should be formed with representation from every department and staffing from the Employee Relations Department. The mission of the Council would be to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of training programs countywide by establishing uniform approaches to assessment of training needs and evaluation of training results, benchmarking, identifying delivery systems to serve common needs of several departments, identifying resources and resource needs to enable all departments to achieve their training goals, and compiling training-related data in a systematic way to facilitate on-going improvement of training countywide. The Council should be comprised of persons responsible for training in their department. The Council should **not** be responsible for assessing training needs in particular departments and should **not** make decisions for departments, but it should act as a facilitator and a resource to assist departments in preparing training plans. It should establish a common framework and coordinate interdepartmental programs, including templates for training assessments and evaluation of training results. The Council should make an annual report to the County Manager on the state of training in the County.

- Miami Dade County should join the National Benchmarking Forum of ASTD. There is an initial cost of \$8500 and an annual cost of \$5000. Membership would provide direct access to what major corporations exerting leadership in the area of training are doing and should facilitate a strategic approach to planning for training. The cost is small relative to total county expenditures on training.
- The training network created as a result of the Training Council will generate capacity for rapid delivery of high priority countywide training programs (such as the recent ethics training) by having in place a “train the trainer” approach for such efforts.
- Every department should include training goals and a training program that is an integral part of strategic planning and annual budgeting.
- Consideration should be given to a countywide benchmark for a minimum annual training experience for every employee. This benchmark could be incorporated into the official leave system as a way of highlighting its importance and tracking its utilization.
- The County should explore opportunities to partner with local companies and corporations in the area of training, perhaps creating a local “benchmarking forum” to make use of local experience, facilities, and resources.